JESSE HILL FORD
Guest columnist

We yearned to answer his call

BEVERLY HILLS, Calif. — It is a quarter-century since the death of Lancer. Now, more than ever, John F. Kennedy's Secret Service code name seems appropriate.

His all-too-brief, albeit incandescent presidency had such a magical quality that the memory of it each year at this season of dying makes us long to find somewhere in the flames of autumn the promise that our country will somehow rise again in unity to scale the heights of excellence his leadership inspired.

In all human experience, from earliest antiquity to the present hour, perhaps nothing except what the world knew during the Crusades can compare. For example, during his cruelly interrupted tenure in the White House, Vietnam was a symbol not of defeat, but of freedom imperiled. Capt. Tom McEwen, USAF, a boyhood friend of mine, volunteered for the air commandos and was shot down and killed during his second tour of duty in Vietnam. His sacrifice and the pain we knew at his loss seemed justified in the name of freedom.

The response to the challenge of the Peace Corps, like the response to our efforts on behalf of South Vietnam, was a rousing hurrah. The USA in that long-ago, magic season yearned to be called to service and sacrifice of the most unselfish kind. Lancer sent out that call, and thousands responded, asking not what this country could do for them but what they could do for this country and for mankind.

When Lancer decreed men upon the moon, just as in Alan Lerner's *Camelot* that inexpressibly fantastic miracle was as good as done, and we achieved world ascendancy in space.

Although it is 25 years today since he was taken from us, his memory remains indelibly alive. No matter that the wilderness of the future was trackless and uncharted, his appeal found his country ready to follow him, though the way be laced with the lairs of one dragon after another. Under Lancer, belief was operative, and therefore nothing else mattered.

It is feckless to speculate on the long catalog of errors that might have been avoided had he lived to the fullness of his years. The Romans observed that the best death is that which is unexpected, cold comfort to be sure. But now, as we face yet another winter without him, may we all find courage to hope that the spring tides of those worthy ambitions with which he imbued the USA may someday rise again and prevail.

Jesse Hill Ford is a novelist and screenwriter.

QUOTELINES

"It was a very complicated plot, brilliantly executed. Could any intelligent person believe that kind of thing was organized by one man?"

— *Marina Oswald Porter, widow of Lee Harvey Oswald*

"It was clear beyond a reasonable doubt that Oswald was the lone gunman who killed President Kennedy."

— *David Belin, legal counsel to Warren Commission*

"The image of America seems to have grown older since his death."

— *Arthur Schlesinger, historian, JFK speech writer*

"Everybody wants another Kennedy. That's sort of dumb. There is not going to be another Abraham Lincoln or another Kennedy."

— *Marc Siwak, high school student, Southfield, Mich.*